



Town of Groton, Connecticut

Meeting Minutes

Town Council Committee of the Whole

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Mayor Harry A. Watson, Councilors Heather Sherman Bond, Kathryn M. Brown-Tracy, Catherine Kolnaski, Deborah B. Monteiro, Frank O'Beirne, Jr., Rita M. Schmidt, Paulann H. Sheets, and James L. Streeter

Wednesday, May 28, 2008

7:00 PM

Northeast Academy Cafetorium

SPECIAL JOINT MEETING WITH THE BOARD OF EDUCATION

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Watson called the meeting to order at 7:07 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Members Present: Mayor Watson, Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor Monteiro, Councilor O'Beirne, Jr. and Councilor Schmidt

Members Absent: Councilor Bond, Councilor Brown-Tracy, Councilor Sheets and Councilor Streeter

Also present were Town Manager Mark Oefinger, Assistant to the Town Manager Lee Vincent and Executive Assistant Nicki Bresnayan.

Board of Education: Beverly Washington, Beth Gianacoplos, Brian Shirvell

3. PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS

None.

4. NEW BUSINESS

2008-0012 Joint Meeting with Board of Education (2008 Standing Referral)

Town Manager Oefinger noted three bodies have a role in the school improvement process, the Board of Education, the Town Council, and the Permanent School Building Committee.

Dr. Jim Mitchell, Superintendent of Schools, explained that the school working committee has been meeting quite a bit over the last two years. At this point, the Town is working toward turning the new schools over to the Board of Education, but there are a number of concerns. The Town is responsible for constructing the schools and the subcontractors report to the Town. Dr. Mitchell stated it is the School Administration's objective to make the Town Council aware of areas that need more progress, e.g. technology and a long punch list. The elementary schools have been occupied for four months and the high school for three months and the technology is still not working. The teachers are getting frustrated and the students are using technology less than they did in the old schools. Dr. Mitchell is also concerned that his staff will not be able to perform sufficient stress tests on the technology equipment if the issue is not resolved before the end of school.

Marie Compton, Director of Media Services, read a statement and noted the following concerns: Promethean boards that are unopened and uninstalled; totally inoperable video networks which mean no access to DVDs, morning announcements, or building-wide video; and inoperable wireless networks which mean that students can not access the internet.

Paul Sikorski, Director of Technology Services, noted there are issues with the wireless network at all three schools, but Fitch High School is the most problematic. Mr., Sikorski stated there are a number of technical issues including intermittent connections; no support contract for hardware; and a number of unfinished tasks by network vendor. Recent tests by the technology contractor revealed problems with the antennae/access point design.

Carolyn Doutre, Principal at Northeast Academy, explained that she loves the new building, however there are glitches. A top priority in the design of the new schools was security, but the access card readers are not working so doors are being propped open. Another issue is the clock system in half of the building is not tied into the master clock system, which means that classes are starting and finishing late. Another concern for Ms. Doutre is the unprotected propane pipe near the loading dock.

Dominick Bassi, Principal at Catherine Kolnaski Magnet School, stated the building is beautiful, but the technology at Eastern Point was better. There are no videos, no morning announcements, and no wireless access. There are also safety issues at the school including a water drain and a "bubbled" floor. There are alarm problems including a lack of testing, and elevator security issues. Mr. Bassi stated he is particularly bothered by a gap in the building structure that opens to the outdoors.

Ms. Doutre and Mr. Bassi both noted that the sound systems in their auditoriums are not useable because of their location.

Bob Bacewicz, Principal at Fitch High School, stated the renovated building is remarkable and has great potential. There is a flaw in the fire alarm system that must be addressed. Mr. Bacewicz has additional concerns with the greenhouse that is not useable because there is no drainage. In the chemistry labs, there is no gas supply. Mr. Bacewicz would like to see a list of items to be completed, who the responsible party is, and what the timeframe for completion is. He noted the same video issues cited by Ms. Doutre and Mr. Bassi.

Wes Greenleaf, Director of Buildings and Grounds, distributed a chronological punch list generated by Groton Public Schools. He briefly reviewed his list.

Councilor O'Beirne asked who looked at the physical design layout and determined that it met specifications. How much of the new technology has been used and proven elsewhere and what warranties came with the new equipment? Were adequate installation tests done?

Scott Celella, JCJ Architects, noted that there is a difference between a completion list, and a punch list which is generated prior to occupancy. The completion lists generated by the Town and Groton Public Schools have been integrated into a single source maintained by Project Manager Rick Norris. Attempts have been made to identify the responsible party and develop a road map for completion, so there is a tracking system in place.

Mr. Celella explained that the defined scope of work is documented during the approval process, however issues manifest themselves during construction. There have been numerous staff meetings and notes have been taken. In his experience, this list is short for this stage of the project and he has not heard any concerns that are not being tracked on the completion list.

With respect to the technology, there are three major components that are affecting the schools. Projector installation involves multiple systems that were procured not as an overall unified system, but in different ways in many pieces. Some equipment has not been installed because the entire systems are not yet working. There is a wiring issue at the high school that needs to be addressed and installation is proceeding. The second component affecting technology is the video network. The entire technology program was a joint venture with the Groton Public Schools' IT department and it still requires a coordinated effort and the input of engineers to work it out. The issue has been difficult in terms of assigning responsibility. The system in place is attempting to utilize new and existing equipment. Mr. Celella noted there has been lots of misinformation and miscommunication on both sides. He added that the wired system is functional. However with the wireless technology, there are issues with the use of cutting edge technology and limited experience.

Mr. Sikorski does not feel the technology is not cutting edge. He asked for a plan from the vendor to address the issues, but he feels he has reached a dead end and there is no progress in addressing the issues.

Gary Schneider, Director of Public Works, noted that the technology was put into use prior to testing. Contractors have been called in by Groton Public Schools directly and things have been changed. Mr. Schneider noted that when the technology was initially bid, items were added by Groton Public Schools and the bids were way over budget. To meet the budget, technology had to be pared down. With respect to the projectors, there was an attempt to purchase the best equipment within the budget. The consultant recommended buying a complete system but that did not happen. At this point, the system that was bid needs to be installed as it was designed and then evaluated. Mr. Schneider indicated that will probably not happen until the end of June or early July, but it should be up and running by the beginning of the next school year.

Board member Gianacoplos stated that the Board and Council are policy makers, and staff needs to address this problem, but there is a communication problem. She expressed her interest in moving forward so that students can use video and wireless, not placing blame. Mr. Schneider noted that the Town is willing to assist with testing over the summer if necessary, but the system has to be in and working before it can be tested. The school working committee meets multiple times per month, and all items have been discussed among staff and are being tracked so that contractors' efforts can be maximized. Extra items that have been requested by Groton Public Schools are being held to see what is left in contingency.

Greg Smolley, JCJ Architects, stated that to move forward, a baseline must be established where installation is complete, testing occurs, and issues are identified at that point. Mr. Smolley noted that the relationship with the Town has been excellent, however good communication did not happen with the technology component. Everyone is trying to upgrade the system with the money that is available. However the technology component "morphed" when Mr. Sikorski and his group were brought into the process and began to request upgrades. The spec that was bid needs to be installed and running before performance is evaluated.

Chairman Washington reiterated that the technology will not be ready this school year and the Board of Education needs to step back and let JCJ do their work.

Town Manager Oefinger noted the May 9th memo from JCJ Architecture outlining the technology issues. Mr. Celella reviewed some portions of the memo and reiterated that there has to be a joint resolution. Mr. Celella feels his memo lays out a plan to move forward. Mr. Smolley reiterated the need to establish a baseline, noting that if the system keeps changing, the problem will never be anyone's responsibility.

Councilor Monteiro feels the Board and Groton Public School staff need to relinquish control and let JCJ proceed in accordance with their memo. Dr. Mitchell noted that Mr. Sikorski must be included in the process and Mr. Smolley suggested that Mr. Sikorski must be willing to give his input, but then step back.

Mr. Bassi recommended establishing completion time lines.

Councilor O'Beirne suggested there is a discontinuity that can only be fixed by going back to the original specifications. The system either meets the specifications or it doesn't. Mr. Schneider assured the Board and Council that no consultants or contractors have been released yet and the system has not been turned over to the Town.

With respect to the lack of gas in the science labs, Mr. Celella noted that this issue was an

oversight not an intentional elimination due to budget constraints. The distribution lines are in place and supply is being designed. The project will be completed before schools open in September. With respect to the greenhouse, a walk through is scheduled to identify issues.

Mr. Schneider explained that the staff is working with Mr. Greenleaf on the best time to repair the floor at Kolnaski School, which is expected to take approximately two weeks. The space must be vacant due to epoxy fumes.

The Board of Education asked Mr. Norris to prioritize the activation of the key card system at Northeast Academy.

Another joint meeting of the Board of Education and the Town Council was scheduled for Wednesday, June 25th at 7:00 p.m. at the Catherine Kolnaski Magnet School.

5. ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Councilor Kolnaski, seconded by Councilor Monteiro, to adjourn at 9:10 p.m.

The motion carried unanimously.